



American Foreign Service Association

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**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMITTEE'S
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL SECURITY, EMERGING THREATS, AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
BY JOHN W. LIMBERT, PRESIDENT
THE AMERICAN FOREIGN SERVICE ASSOCIATION**

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee,

On behalf of the 13,000 members of the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), I thank you for this opportunity to share our views with the Subcommittee on the crucial matter of protecting “soft targets” overseas. We feel very strongly about this issue. AFSA’s first concern is always the safety, well-being and security of our people – including their families -- overseas.

For those of us in the Foreign Service, as well as other civilian federal employees serving with us, and all our families, as well, the term “soft targets” is a euphemism. What we are talking about is threats against the schools our children attend and the school buses they ride in, our homes and vehicles, the recreation centers and places of worship we attend, and the places we shop and eat as we live our daily lives – all the activities we take for granted here in this blessed land. We take these threats personally, and so, Mr. Chairman, we very much welcome these hearings.

The American Foreign Service Association is both the professional organization and recognized bargaining agent for the active-duty and retiree members of the Foreign Service in the Departments of State, Commerce and Agriculture, the United States Agency for International Development, and the International Broadcasting Bureau. We have over 13,000 members, who represent about 75 percent of the total active-duty force and about 26 percent of all retirees. I and AFSA’s four agency vice presidents are active-duty Foreign Service and the majority of our

Governing Board are also active-duty members. When we leave our current positions, we go back into the regular Foreign Service to serve in posts around the world. Thus the issues you raise here and the recommendations you make will affect our lives directly.

AFSA, like the Executive Branch and the Congress, has always been extremely concerned about improving embassy security. Our concern grew after the bombings of our embassies in Nairobi, Kenya and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania – soft targets in their own way -- in 1998. We note the sobering findings of the Accountability Review Boards investigating those bombings that the “emergence of sophisticated and global terrorist networks aimed at U.S. interests abroad have dramatically changed the threat environment.” That’s diplospeak for, “It’s gotten a lot more dangerous out there.”

Now posts and missions that we once considered safe are no longer such. The report said that terrorists could strike us anywhere. And they did; they hit us in Amman, Jordan, in Islamabad, Pakistan, in the port of Aden, Yemen, and even in New York City and Washington, D.C.

In those days after the East Africa bombings, AFSA worked with the Congress as it developed the “Secure Embassy Construction and Counterterrorism Act of 1999,” (PL 106-113) and the provisions outlining efforts and funding to improve the security of our posts and missions abroad. When we thought the administration’s funding request was too low, based upon the recommendations of the Accountability Review Boards, we joined others in urging the administration to seek additional funds. Conversely, when the requests were at the ARB-recommended levels, we fully supported the administration’s request. As we consider our Aug. 7, 1998, starting point, AFSA applauds the work of the Clinton and Bush administrations, Secretaries of State Albright, Powell and Rice, and the many professionals working at the Department of State and elsewhere, and our friends in the Congress for their hard work and diligence in improving the

security of our missions abroad. But the work of strengthening our missions is not done. At current levels of funding, including resources from the Capital Security Cost Sharing program, it will still take about 14 years to bring all of our posts and missions to current security standards.

Mr. Chairman, as we strengthened our workplaces, there was always the concern that terrorists would expand their sights to areas previously out of bounds. We feared they would target Americans (particularly those working for the U.S. government) and their families, in places that did not have the same protection. As we saw more evidence that our fears were well founded and that more than our offices were targets, AFSA has been expressing our concerns regarding the need to protect the so-called “soft targets.” We wish to thank the Congress, particularly the Appropriations Committees of the House and Senate, for recognizing that protection goes beyond bricks and wire of our posts and missions to include the Foreign Service community as well. These committees required the Department of State to develop plans to protect soft targets, and provided initial funding to begin the process. In testimony before the Congress in March 2004, the Department of State recognized the problem of soft target protection and outlined initial funding.

In this context, AFSA believes it is most fitting to evaluate how this effort is progressing by means of both the Government Accountability Office (GAO) study and this hearing. We thank you for this initiative and concern on behalf of the entire Foreign Service family.

Mr. Chairman, before proceeding, I need to say that I am not a security specialist; nor were my predecessors. While we have security specialists in our membership, and on our Governing Board, AFSA does not claim expertise in this area. But I do have 32 years’ experience in the Foreign Service, mostly in the Arab and Islamic world, and have served in places such as Tehran, Algiers and Baghdad. So with this caveat and with your permission, I would like to discuss some of our concerns and observations that we have as members of the Foreign Service posted abroad.

Appropriations Resolution, 2003” required the Department of State “to formulate a strategy for addressing such threats to locales that are either frequented by Americans or are symbolic of the United States. The conferees are particularly concerned about the safety of American schools abroad, as well as international schools attended by American children. ...” Formulating a strategy to protect our people in all of the situations described in the Conference Report is probably beyond the scope, authority and resources of the Department of State. However, a comprehensive strategy with different levels of responses should, of course, consider threats to sites such as employee residences and recreational facilities. But as the Conference Report states, the department should also consider other places frequented by Americans. For example, the Protestant International Church in Islamabad, Pakistan, where embassy employee Barbara Green and her 17-year-old daughter Kristen Wormsley were killed by a terrorist attack in March 2002, was one of the few English-speaking Christian churches in that city. In 2002, a nightclub in Bali, Indonesia, was the target of a terrorist attack **because** it was a popular destination for Western tourists. These sites and others, such as restaurants and hotels that may be frequently used for meetings by embassy and consulate staff, or for providing quarters for officials on temporary duty or for congressional or staff delegations, and the many schools our children attend, are all in the private sector. In such places there are limits to what the U.S. government can and should do. But because such facilities are also associated with the U.S. government and its personnel, one can amend the mission’s security strategy to include them.

The reporting requirements in the 2003 Consolidated Appropriations Conference Report, and in other Senate Appropriations Committee reports, go into detail about protection of the schools our children attend while we serve abroad. AFSA welcomes this emphasis but we would ask for consideration of school buses and the assembly points for our children as they wait for the bus. We understand that when the GAO team held discussions with families at our posts overseas, this area

was of very high concern, and I believe that is true of our entire membership. School buses, of necessity, follow regular routes and pick up children at predictable places. Schools themselves can be targets where our children, in large numbers, meet to learn and play during recess. The 2004 terrorist attack on Russian school children by Chechen terrorists showed that schools were no longer “off limits”.

We understand that the State Department has started a phased plan for the protection of many of the schools it sponsors that our children and the children of other Americans and English-speaking families attend overseas. AFSA supports this plan and urges its continued funding and review as conditions change. We know that terrorists have adapted and will adapt to changes in security procedures. We must also change and improve our procedures if we are to protect our families.

We believe a comprehensive, multi-layered, multi-response protection of soft targets should have other components. Education is one of them. It is vital that training for Chiefs of Mission, Deputy Chiefs of Mission, management officers, and diplomatic security professionals include a strong anti-terrorist and soft target protection component. Our senior leaders overseas – backed by senior leaders in the department -- should be thinking about protection of their people beyond embassy walls. One issue is the use of flextime for embassy personnel. The experts tell us, “Vary your times and routes. Established patterns for going to the embassy and going home increase the danger of attack.” Sounds simple? It isn’t always. Requirements for a person to be at work at a certain time and to remain there until a certain time force the employee to establish patterns – patterns that terrorists will use in their planning. Flextime could save lives.

In terms of training, one should also consider how much and what security training we should provide to all Foreign Service personnel. If our personnel had been better trained to detect surveillance, would such training have saved USAID Officer Larry Foley who was killed in his

driveway in Amman, Jordan, three years ago? The concept of “duck and cover” should be well known regarding explosions, but the Accountability Review Board reports on the East Africa embassy bombings indicate that many died when they went to windows to see what the commotion was after an initial hand grenade exploded. It may be excessive to teach everyone how to do evasive driving or fire weapons, but security experts should consider how we train our personnel in this new threat environment.

Finally instructions, security requirements and methods of enforcement must all be clear and consistent whether they come from Washington or from a specific post. On-again, off-again attention to the security of our personnel from terrorist attacks sends the message that we do not take terrorism seriously and we do not care about the safety of our people.

Mr. Chairman, some would say about our families, “if you can’t protect them, don’t send them”. I disagree with this statement. There has always been a risk in our profession. It comes with our oath of office. Certainly there are places, such as Iraq or Afghanistan, which are so dangerous that we should not send families. It is also clear that there are times you need to evacuate families and personnel. The number of unaccompanied positions is increasing and today there are over 500 unaccompanied positions around the world. During my 32 year Foreign Service career, however, I have seen an important difference in the operation of posts where a family accompanies the member of the Service, and when they are posted by themselves. Accompanied posts run better and the morale is much higher. Further unaccompanied tours are much shorter (usually one year, as opposed to two to four years accompanied). That short tour means constant turnover of personnel and creates serious problems of management and staffing.

AFSA has always maintained that you cannot make overseas duty 100-percent safe. We do not expect that, and the Foreign Service cannot operate effectively in fortresses. The world is dangerous and it is getting more so. We understand that and we accept it. When we joined the

Foreign Service, we knew that there would be hardship and danger for ourselves and our families.

But we joined anyway, because we believed that this work was important to our nation and our fellow Americans. We remain proud of what we do to advance America's interests around the world. Nonetheless, AFSA urges the department to take whatever measures are necessary (including constant review in light of changing threats) to provide safety and security of our people – *all* of them – overseas. We also urge Congress to support the department in providing that safety and security so vital to our people and our operations.

Again, Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, I wish to express my appreciation for hearing the views of the Foreign Service on this very important issue. We thank you for requesting the GAO study and for conducting this hearing. We also encourage you to continue to review this area as an oversight responsibility to see that the protection of “soft targets” continues.